we rest amidst the mad tumult of war

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we rest amidst the mad tumult of war

by waitingforsols

Summary

Rosie slowly wandered down the stairs, following the sound of Frank Sinatra's voice as he sang Fools Rush In (Where Angels Fear To Tread) into one of the many sitting rooms. He wasn't sure who he expected to see occupying the space, but it certainly wasn't Harry Crosby.

or

A rewrite of Part 6 where Harry Crosby is sent to the Flak House with the crew of Rosie's Riveters.

Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

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Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Rosie slowly wandered down the stairs, following the sound of Frank Sinatra's voice as he sang Fools Rush In (Where Angels Fear To Tread) into one of the many sitting rooms. He wasn't sure who he expected to see occupying the space, but it certainly wasn't Harry Crosby.

"Couldn't sleep either?" Crosby asked. He was sitting on the ground in front of the couch with one leg propped up, sipping a glass of whiskey. Rosie shook his head, wandering over to the record player.

"Doc said it would take a day or two to adjust," Rosie mocked, throwing an annoyed look over his shoulder as he rolled his eyes, causing Crosby to laugh softly. "There's some good stuff here. Mind if I put something on?"

"Please," Crosby encouraged, leaning forward to grab the bottle of whiskey on the coffee table. "You play?" Crosby asked as he poured another glass.

"Not a note," Rosie laughed. He picked up one of the records and examined it before switching it out for the one currently on the record player. "My mother and sister got all the musical talent, but I know what sounds good–Thanks," he accepted the glass being handed to him as he took a seat in the armchair across from the couch. "You?"

"Clarinet in Oskaloosa Municipal Band. Nothing special, just your typical John Philip Sousa," Crosby spoke dismissively. He took a sip but not without making a face.

Rosie took a sip. It was strong and he couldn't help the twitch of his nose. "That where you from? Okalooska?" He tried and failed to pronounce the name.

“Yeah, just about,” Crosby giggled into his glass. “Iowa. Real middle of nowhere.”

Rosie smiled, looking down at his glass as he swirled the liquid around. “Brooklyn, New York born and raised for me.”

“Same as Biddick,” Crosby recalled, gesturing towards the pilot with his drink. “Lieutenant Curtis Biddick, that is. Pilot. Was a damn good one, too.”

“Would have loved to meet him,” Rosie responded politely. He knew he shouldn’t ask, but his curiosity and the fancy whiskey got the better of him. “When’d he go down?”

The navigator took a sip as he mulled over the facts in his head. “Regensburg. A shuttle mission to Africa back in August.”

“Oh,” Rosie murmured, It was the first time someone had openly talked about a man who had gone down in more than just passing—an unspoken rule Rosie himself firmly abided by. He was intrigued regardless.

“Balancing fuel levels and flak and fighters, by ourselves no less,” Crosby grimaced. “Eleven hours and nine Forts later, we’re in Africa. I know it doesn’t seem too bad looking back now, it was only my sixth mission but... Sorry, forget I said anything.”

“How many have you flown now?” Rosie inquired softly.

“Sixteen,” Crosby raised his glass. “With each one worse than the last. As I’m sure you are well acquainted.”

Rosie raised his drink to match Crosby. They both downed the last of their whiskey.

“I know I sound pathetic,” Crosby looked down at his empty glass with a grimace. “We signed up for this. It’s what we are trained to do, but I can’t help but feel useless. And it just doesn’t feel right that after a mission I can go to London and see a stage show when somewhere out there a war is going on. A war seemingly much worse than ours. While we are snug in bed, our boys are digging foxholes and eating K rations. We’re getting shot at, same as they are, but after we land we can drink our fill and find solace in the companionship of other men and women.”

Rosie’s head perked up. Finally, he found someone who shared the

same thoughts he'd been having since arriving at this place. It was like Crosby was reading his mind. "Exactly, because this? This right here? This is exactly what you don't do. Croquet? Riding with hounds? Whatever that is…"

"Fox hunting," Crosby supplied.

"You don't go fox hunting!" Rosie scoffed, leaning back in the chair. "You don't go talking about it. You don't go crying about it. You get back in the seat, and you finish the damn job." Crosby shrank in on himself, just slightly ducking his head as he contemplated how Rosie perceived their role. There was truth in his words, sentiments that Crosby obviously shared, but going out of your way to avoid talking about the fallen seemed detrimental. He knew Rosie was smart; had known it from the first time he'd spoken to him at Lt. Dye's party. The pilot was well aware of the fallacies in his argument, sounding as though he was trying to convince himself more than Crosby.

"I was in a rhythm, you know? Three days, three missions, three wheels down. Boom, boom, boom. It's like Gene Krupa. You don't stop Gene Krupa in the middle of a drum solo, do you? But two weeks later ask him to dip right back in where he left off without missing a beat, do ya?" Crosby nodded, pulling his knee closer to his chest. He took his time answering, carefully choosing how to phrase what to say.

"It's an awful feeling, being stuck on the sidelines, especially when your crew is up there without you. But it's easy to forget that in my new position, I am still responsible for the safety of my crew. Only now I'm responsible for all of the crews and I need to think about more than just myself because it's my job to bring them home. It just looks a bit different now."

Rosie was caught off guard. He knew what Crosby was doing by making such a comment, and yet he still found himself contemplating his words. He slid off the chair to join Crosby on the ground, leaning back against the armchair. Rosie grabbed the bottle and filled both of their glasses.

Chapter End Notes

FACT CORNER
(1) The title is inspired by the forward/dedication of The Story of the Century written by John R. Nilsson in 1946 and published privately. It recounts the 100th Bomb Group's time in England and is overall a very fun read! It can be read here:

https://100thbg.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Story-of-the-Century.pdf
(2) Harry Crosby did play clarinet in the Oskaloosa Municipal Band (A Wing and a Prayer, Page 80)
(3) Crosby did last all of 12 hours and 16 minutes in pilot training (Harry Crosby's scrapbook, Smithsonian website somewhere)

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

When he was woken up, the only sign Crosby had been there at all was the whiskey bottle on the counter with only a sliver of liquid remaining. He wandered through the grounds of the mansion for the rest of the day. Rosie refused to acknowledge the fact that he was seeking out the navigator's company, instead choosing to wander from space to space without direction. He ended the day in bed, staring at the ceiling much like the night before.

This time, when he made his way to the sitting room, Crosby was nowhere to be found.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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This time, when he made his way to the sitting room, Crosby was nowhere to be found. Rosie resigned himself to spending the night alone with his thoughts but was gladly surprised to find it had been Crosby who meandered his way down the grand staircase lured by the soft dulcet tones emanating from the record player. Crosby, however, was a little shocked to see the pilot who had already made a name for himself sitting on the ground where Crosby had been the night prior. On the coffee table was a familiar bottle with two glasses already filled.

"I didn't see you around today," Rosie greeted warmly. He was in a much better mood than Crosby had imagined for a man being here against his will. Crosby carefully lowered himself to the floor beside the pilot, both now leaning back against the couch.

"Well, let's see…" Crosby smiled. "I slept… took a bath… slept some

more… aaand now I'm here."

"And now you're here," Rosie repeated, handing him a glass. They sipped in unison.

"Sleep doesn't usually come too easily these days it seems," Crosby confided. He looked up at the ceiling as he composed his thoughts. "My mind has a way of putting together hypothetical missions so realistic they should count towards the mission quota."

Rosie nodded sympathetically. "You, uh… you talk to Doc at all?" He asked curiously.

"Didn't tell me anything I don't already know," Crosby smiled ruefully. "Have you?"

"Briefly," Rosie responded. "I found him to be a bit… abstruse. Told me my head is always in the clouds."

Crosby raised an eyebrow. "He knows you're a pilot, right?"

"He does," Rosie chuckled.

"And he knows we're in England?"

"Well, now that you mention it," he joked softly. "He recommended that I find something on the ground to anchor myself to."

"A plane without an anchor is dangerous-"

"A plane with an anchor?" Rosie raised an eyebrow.

"Landing gear, then," Crosby amended readily. "A plane without landing gear is dangerous."

"A skilled pilot can land without landing gear, Croz."

"I know and I've had three of them," Crosby retorted. "What I think he's trying to say, is maybe you need to find something worth your while in between missions, something to look forward to."

"Maybe," Rosie murmured.

"Look, you got a girl back in Brooklyn?" Crosby questioned.

"Oh– Uh, no," he shook his head, taking a drink.

“A beau then?”

Rosie choked on his drink. “What?”

Crosby hid his grin behind his glass. “It doesn’t matter to me. Or most of the 100th for the record… no one gives a shit about personal beliefs or preferences.”

Rosie just stared at the man.

“Usually I’m pretty good at being able to tell,” the navigator added. “But you’re pretty enigmatic. I’ll take that as a no, though?”

“Have you seen my ugly mug, Croz?” Rosie tried to joke once he’d finally caught his breath.

“You’re delusional,” Crosby huffed. “You could easily have anyone you wanted. All you gotta do is give ‘em that handsome smile of yours — yep, that’s the one, and they’ll be done for.”

“Handsome smile, huh?” Rosie laughed, thankful his cheeks were already flushed from the alcohol. He tried to hide his euphoria by pouring them each another round from a new bottle.

“Just so you know, I’m usually not much of a drinker,” Crosby confessed shyly. His face was as flushed as Rosie’s felt. “Last time, I ended up on the floor of a hotel room with no boots.”

Rosie raised an eyebrow. “And I suppose you are not usually one to seek comfort from the lady of the night?”

“Oh! No- well, uh, I mean…“ Crosby stuttered. He let out a nervous laugh. “Ah, no. This wasn’t- it wasn’t like that. Bubbles and I, we were on a weekend pass and Bubbles invented this game with quarters and boots. And basically, I ended up with no quarters and no boots.” Crosby exhaled, running a hand through his hair. Rosie’s chuckle caught his attention and he looked up from the ground with a small smile. “It gets a little blurry after that, but the last thing I remember is spewing in the bathroom with Bubbles and there was only one toilet.”

“He was Group Navigator before you, correct?”

“He was, yeah. He went down in Munster…” Crosby’s voice trailed off and he rubbed his nose with the back of his hand. “Bubbles was, uh… he was my best friend.”

“I’m sorry, Croz,” Rosie sighed. He sounded genuine, much to Crosby’s relief as he didn’t feel quite up for a philosophical discussion over war tonight.

“It was my fault,” he shook his head, wrapping his arms loosely around his knees, one hand holding onto his opposite wrist and the other holding his glass.

“How?” Rosie scoffed.

“I replaced Bubbles as group navigator. If he had been there to plan the missions, then maybe all those planes wouldn’t have gone down and maybe Bubbles would still be here and…”

“Crosby,” Rosie demanded his attention but made sure to keep his voice soft. When the navigator didn’t look at him, Rosie placed a hand on his arm and squeezed. Crosby finally looked up. “You need to understand that it’s not your fault. And if you need someone to blame then blame the people who decided to take over entire countries; who decided that they have the right to prosecute and subjugate whoever they please.“ Crosby started to look away again so he reached out and gently pressured his chin, encouraging the man to look at him. “Harry, if Bubbles was here, he’d be telling you the same thing and you know it.” The navigator was quiet, not making a sound except for an occasional sniffle.
Rosie moved closer and put his arm on Crosby’s knee. “You know, you should have seen Bubbles when we returned from Bremen without you.”

That must have caught Crosby’s attention because he peeked at him from behind his hands. He gave Rosie a quizzical look.

“He questioned every single crew at debrief and then scoured through every navigator’s log by hand when he didn’t like what he heard,” Rosie recalled. “Rumor has it he barricaded himself in his office.”

“Sounds about right,” Crosby snorted.

“Several hours later I see him getting dragged out of Group Ops by Brady, Hamilton, and Crank, kickin’ and spittin’ every insult and threat in the book.”

“Bubbles has a real mouth on him,” Crosby agreed. “I just– I just can’t understand how it’s possible to spend nearly every minute of every day with a guy for years… just for them to be gone in a second,” he croaked.

“Nothing says he’s gone, Croz.”

“Your guy saw him-“ Crosby cut himself off, swallowing roughly. “You heard what your guy said, Ro.”

“So? That doesn’t mean jack shit, Rosie shrugged. “When you went down, they said they saw four chutes; come to find out none of you even bailed.”

Crosby didn’t reply right away, instead choosing to take a drink. Rosie finished his own and took the navigator’s now-empty glass, setting both on the table. “I just… I miss him.”

“I know,” Rosie murmured, wrapping an arm around his shoulders and pulling him close. Crosby let his head fall to the pilot’s shoulders.

Chapter End Notes

FACT CORNER:
(1) When Crosby would take pass to London, he would often take a long bath sleep and then sleep for 12 hours straight (A Wing and a Prayer, Page Something)

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

> “Mind if I join you?”
>
> “Not at all,” he grinned, looking up from his book at the sound of the familiar voice. When he glanced over at the man beside him, he couldn't help but be shocked. He was wearing a pair of form-fitting, navy swimming briefs and a white button-up left open with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. He had seen similar articles of clothing in the wardrobes filled to the brim with fabrics of all sizes and colors, but it was still a shock to see him out of military attire. It was far from the likes of his pressed uniform, worn exactly as was standard issue without any flaws.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Mind if I join you?”

“Not at all,” he grinned, looking up from his book at the sound of the familiar voice. When he glanced over at the man beside him, he couldn't help but be shocked. He was wearing a pair of form-fitting, navy swimming briefs and a white button-up left open with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. He had seen similar articles of clothing in the wardrobes filled to the brim with fabrics of all sizes and colors, but it was still a shock to see him out of military attire. It was far from the likes of his pressed uniform, worn exactly as was standard issue without any flaws.

Crosby set out his towel and laid down on it, propping himself up on his elbows as he took in the warmth from the sun. “The water isn’t too bad,” he smiled brightly at Rosie, but the pilot couldn’t bring himself to smile back. Crosby’s legs and arms were littered with faded bruising in mottled shades of purple and green and a bit yellow around the edges.

He must have noticed Rosie’s staring because he spoke again.

“Got into a fight with a tree,” Crosby explained dryly. “We lost, despite what Blakely might say.” That startled a laugh out of Rosie, much to Crosby’s delight.

“The only tree for miles, I heard,” Rosie teased.“I’m inclined to agree with him considering you’re currently sitting here in front of me.”

Crosby looked up and mumbled something about daring-do pilots before leaning over to look at the book in Rosie’s hand. “What are you reading?”

“Of Mice and Men by–” he turned it over to read the author, but Crosby beat him to it.

“John Steinbeck,” Crosby filled in, nodding thoughtfully. “Try to understand men, if you understand each other you will be kind to each other. Knowing a man well never leads to hate and nearly always leads to love. There are shorter means, many of them. There is writing promoting social change, writing punishing injustice, writing in celebration of heroism, but always that base theme. Try to understand each other.’”
Rosie was stunned by the depth of the navigator’s words as he recited. “That’s in here?”

“No,” Crosby smiled sheepishly as he sat up. “It’s from one of his journal entries. 1938. You read Tortilla Flat?”

Rosie shook his head. “Sounds familiar, though.”

“It’s not for everyone,” Crosby admitted bluntly. “The plot can be a little… meandering. A bit too casual to evoke any deep emotions, but it’s a fun read. Mindless. I think they made a movie out of it last year.”

“Maybe they’ll have it here,” Rosie suggested. Crosby hummed thoughtfully. They watched as the two boats lined up side by side. One of the Red Cross girls stood on the shore with a red and white handkerchief. She counted down from three, signaling the start of a race.

“Let’s go boys!!” Rosie shouted, cupping his mouth with his hands.

“C’mon Ronnie!” Crosby joined in the yelling, urging on the other navigator as they neared the finish line where another girl stood.

“Pick up the pace Pappy! I know you can paddle harder than that!”

Both men cheered as the boys from the 100th were declared winners, collapsing back onto the grass in fits of laughter. The boat turned around and floated past them, men raising their paddles above their heads as they whooped and hollered in celebration of their victory.

“We studied him in one of my classes during my undergraduate studies. He’s got some good stuff,” Crosby sighed once the others were down the creek a ways. He was out of breath as he gestured to Rosie’s book.

“Oh yeah? Where’d you study at?”

“University of Iowa.”

“Brooklyn College then Brooklyn Law School for me,” Rosie added.

“That’s right, you are a lawyer. Impressive,” Crosby commented.

“Come on,” Rosie laughed, looking out across the manor grounds.

“Seriously, I’m impressed!” Crosby shoved his shoulder gently.

“What about you then?” Rosie shot back.

“Oh, uh, Literature,” he dismissed. “I was in the master's program before I enlisted.”

“What were you going to do with your degree?”

Crosby looked shocked. “No one’s ever asked me that,” he looked down, picking at the blades of grass between his fingertips. “Usually they just scoff at me or laugh.”

“Well, you know what Steinbeck says: ‘Try to understand each other’ and all that,’” he waved a hand vaguely in the air.

“I wanted to teach after I got my PhD, that is,” Crosby said once he got control of his giggles.

“No wonder you’re a navigator, Croz,” Rosie chuckled, shaking his head.

“Hey,” he protested, grinning broadly. “I’ll have you know I was in pilot training for all of twelve hours and six minutes!” Rosie threw his head back and laughed out loud.

Once they calmed down, they merely sat there in the grass. Crosby leaned over and grabbed Rosie’s book from the ground and scooted back to lean against the tree. He opened to the page with the blade of grass the pilot had used as a makeshift bookmark and began to read. Despite the slightest change in tone when reading dialogue for different characters, there was warmth when he spoke.

Rosie lay back intending to lie on the grass but the back of his head inadvertently landed on Crosby's bare thigh. His eyes snapped open to look up at Crosby, but the man didn't even stutter as he read aloud. He decided if it was okay with Crosby then he would stay right where he was.

It wasn't long before Ron, Milburn, and Pappy joined the pair underneath the tree, voices loud and joyous as they approached. They grew softer as they noticed Crosby reading from a book with a hand softly carding through Rosie's hair. At first, Ron and Milburn would mumble quietly amongst themselves as they tried to discern the plot, but Pappy filled them in with the basics fairly quickly. They made it through a couple of chapters before their stomachs indicated it was time to head inside for a warm meal. The trio strolled ahead deep in debate over what would be served that night. Croz and Rosie walked side by side behind them, occasionally bumping shoulders as they worked their way back to the house.

Chapter End Notes

FACT CORNER
(1) Rosie was reading Of Mice and Men :)
(2) Crosby did last all of 12 hours and 16 minutes in pilot training (Harry Crosby's scrapbook, Smithsonian website somewhere)

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

> “Yeah, what gives?” Ronald gestured vaguely to the horse with both hands in mock exasperation. “I thought Jews from New York don’t ride horses!”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Hey, Rosie!” Pappy waved as he approached, Milburn and Ronald following closely behind. Rosie looked down at his hands as he tightened his hold on the reins the way the hostess showed them, pleased when the horse complied with his request by coming to a stop beside the members of his crew.

“Boys,” he greeted with a smile.

“Lookin’ pretty sharp up there,” Milburn teased.

“Yeah, what gives?” Ronald gestured vaguely to the horse with both hands in mock exasperation. “I thought Jews from New York don’t ride horses!”

“Maybe not, but they’ll ride pretty officers,” Milburn added suggestively, lowering his voice. Rosie’s eyes snapped up to look at the navigator riding the big bay some ways ahead and then back to glare down at the man grinning up at him. The pair behind him roared with laughter.

“Ease up, Rosie,” Pappy beamed up at him. He reached forward to pat Rosie’s knee. “We know you’d wear the pants.”

“Hey now, I think you’re missing the point!” Ronald shook his head, stepping forward. He threw an arm around the copilot’s shoulders and leaned forward to whisper loudly. “He don’t want to be wearing pants.” This sent them into another fit and Rosie had decided he’d had enough of their taunting.

“Alright, alright. I’ve had enough of you three,” Rosie huffed, rolling his eyes as he urged his horse forward. After a few hesitant steps, the horse began steadily down the path away from the heckling men. Ron raised his hands in mock surrender as he stepped away from the

horse.

“Stay out of trouble!” He twisted in the saddle to call back to the men.

“Sir, yes sir!” Milburn enthusiastically mock-saluted, sending the trio into another fit of giggles. Rosie shook his head in disbelief as he proceeded down the path.

The navigator stopped, waiting for Rosie to catch up after hearing the rambunctious trio.

“What are they on about?” Crosby questioned with a smile, having caught just the very tail end of their interaction.

“They're just muckin’ around, Croz,” he dismissed, immediately changing the subject. “You say you’ve done this before?”

“Well, I got the horsemanship badge in Boy Scouts when I was thirteen,” he recalled as they walked side-by-side down the dirt path. The hostess and another airmen were up ahead of them chatting.

“Hadn’t ridden a horse since, until yesterday. Figured it’d be like riding a bike.”

“Was it?” Rosie asked curiously.

“No, not at all,” Crosby confessed. “Nearly bucked me off the first chance he got.”

“You’re joking.”

“Oh, it gets worse,” he assured, glancing over at Rosie before returning his gaze to the path ahead of them. “Mrs. Howard told me to let him loose so I eased up on the rein— just a bit— and the devil took off. Cleared the entire field and was headed straight for the six-foot-tall hedge topped with barbed wire. For a moment there I didn’t believe he would stop.”

“But he did.”

“I didn’t,” Crosby admitted. “Flew out of the saddle and ended up wrapped around his neck, barbed wire about a foot away from my nose. Then these two–” Crosby points to the pair in front of them. “— come sauntering up to me and he asks ‘How long did you say you’ve been riding?’”

“What’d you say?”

"'Oh, this? I just wanted him to know we're good friends.'" Crosby leaned down and patted the horse's neck. "We seemed to have reached an agreement after that, he and I."

Rosie laughed at the navigator's misfortune but he didn't seem to mind. "So, uh. What's his name?"

"Roseakin but Mrs.Howard calls him Rose."

Oh. He tried to push down the embarrassment.

He noticed the look on Rosie's face.
"Aww, don't worry, Rosie," Croz teased, but Rosie knew his smile was genuine. "I'd take you over a horse any day."

"Thanks, Croz," Rosie huffed. "That means a lot."
They rode in silence for a bit longer, content to take in the sights and sounds of the English countryside until Crosby abruptly turned to face him.

"Have you met Mo?"

"Mo?"

"Mo," Crosby repeated. His tone of voice made it seem like Rosie should definitely already know who Mo was, so he wracked his brain looking for someone with that name but came up empty.

"Can't say that I do."

"Maybe I'll have to introduce you when we get back," Crosby pondered. "You'll love him. He's a feisty little fella."

"There's someone on base shorter than you?" Rosie quipped, much to his own amusement.

"I thought you were above short jokes," he groaned.

"No, but I am above you," he said matter-of-factly. Crosby's jaw dropped in shock but Rosie was able to spot a slight upward curve in the corners of his mouth, even as the man looked to the sky in disappointment.

"Fuck you, Ro," Crosby huffed, shaking his head slowly while trying and mostly succeeding to suppress his laughter.

"Come oooon, Croz. You know you love me," he crowed.

Crosby laughed out loud then and spurred his horse into a fast trot, pulling ahead of the pilot. Rosie grinned and did the same.

There was something about watching the landscape fly by that always got Rosie's heart pumping. The only time he felt the wind in his hair when flying was if the glass of the cockpit had been shot out. He would prefer an in-tact windscreen, for the record, but there was something freeing about the roar of the wind in your ears and the feeling of harsh gusts of wind against your cheeks. For a moment it was like he was back in a Stearman during pilot training.

It was nice.

Losing to Crosby in a race across the meadow was certainly not, but seeing the beaming grin on the navigator's face made it worth it.

After their ride, Crosby helped Rosie dismount and then led their horses into their stalls. They removed the tack with Rosie mostly just following Crosby's instructions. Crosby was in the middle of showing him how to brush down Roseakin when they heard it.

The unmistakable cry of an air raid siren.

It hung in the air, steady and strong and unrelenting. It didn't pierce your eardrums or strike like a lightning bolt to your core. The siren loomed over your shoulder, whispering its melody in your ears. A part of him wanted to stop and listen, let his eyes become transfixed on the air in a fatal lethargy as he searched for whatever it was it wanted him to see, but they knew better. They would heed its warning.

Rosie immediately took action, grabbing Crosby by the wrist and pulling him out of the stall. Crosby resisted once they'd left the confines of the stall. He whirled around, fumbling with the latch on the stall and locking it shut. Roseakin was calm, much to Crosby's surprise, though he supposed this wasn't the first time the horse had heard the sirens.
They paused for only a moment as Rosie glanced towards the main manor on the other side of the property. It was much too far for them to reach and make it into the cellar. He scanned the area and made his decision. The only warning Crosby had was the tug on his arm before they were sprinting across the courtyard towards a stone structure. The hay bales were loosely piled from the floor to the ceiling in some places.

Rosie tugged him again, leading him straight into the seemingly endless abyss of hay. He turned sideways and squeezed into a small

gap between two columns. Pieces of hay scratched at the skin on his face and bare forearms as they delved deeper, jabbing him through his clothing. They dropped to the floor which was just wide enough for them to sit with their backs to one of the bales, knees pressed tightly to their chests. They sat hip-to-hip, snuggly situated between the two towering stacks as the siren continued to sound. Crosby cowered into the pilot's side. His eyes were squeezed shut, face pressed firmly into Rosie's shoulder. Rosie immediately wrapped an arm around his shoulder and pulled him even closer. Crosby was tense in his hold, chest heaving and hands shaking from adrenaline. He covered the navigator's hand with his own and rested the side of his head on top of Crosby's while they did the only thing they could. Wait.

The siren never faltered, continuing to persistently drone on not unlike the creatures of Greek mythos of which it shared a name; With a haunting cry, it lured fools in to meet a terrible fate. It was here, sitting here in this hay barn, that Crosby realized that it was too late for him. He had fallen for the Song of the Siren, heard its sweet song, and could not resist following it all the way to England. He was a fool who did not see the song of war for the siren that it was with a refrain that appealed not to his flesh but to his spirit.

After what felt like hours but was more like minutes, the siren began to wane. It did not end as abruptly as it began. The waning whine was like that of a wounded animal dying a slow and painful death, letting out one last warning to ward off others from succumbing to a similar fate.

Neither of them moved. The silence stretched on as they tried to suppress the heaviness of their breathing. They listened closely for the telltale sign of aircraft overhead.

They heard none.

More time passed and still, there was nothing.
Rosie craned his head to look at his watch, squinting in the dim light. Crosby lifted his head and instead pressed his ear to Rosie's shoulder to try and get a look at the watch himself. Rosie titled it so he could see.

They'd been in here for half an hour already.
They locked eyes and came to a silent agreement. Crosby stood and offered Rosie a hand. He accepted and Crosby pulled him to his feet.

They shimmied out of hay stacks and hesitantly made their way out of

the hay barn. They didn’t encounter a single person on their trek back up to the main house. Heading for one of the back entrances, Crosby fell in step behind Rosie. He placed a steadying hand on the man's shoulder in front of him as he ascended the staircase with his eyes intently focused on his feet.

Rosie felt a hand squeeze his shoulder when they reached the top. He stopped in place and waited as Crosby moved to stand facing him. He watched curiously as Crosby reached up and plucked a piece of hay from his hair. He held it in front of Rosie's face for a moment before tucking it into Rosie's breast pocket with a soft pat and turning to head inside.

"It was a false alarm, boys," one of the nurses called sweetly, having spotted them from the hallway. "Was one of the RAF bases nearby, so there's no danger here regardless. Why don't you boys go clean up and get ready for dinner?”

"Thank you, ma'am," Crosby nodded. She gave a dazzling smile that was sure to make most men swoon.

Fingertips splayed against his lower back as Rosie stepped up by his side. He looked at the pilot and gave a soft smile.

Chapter End Notes

FACT CORNER
(1) Crosby was in fact in Boy Scouts, but I’m not sure if he got a horsemanship badge (A Wing and a Prayer, Page 46)
(2) The horse story is from an article where a bombardier recalls his time in a flak house. Additionally, there is a story in there about an air raid siren going off at a nearby base and all the boys lowkey panicking. https://www.historynet.com/flak-house-days/

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

It's a shame it has to end, Rosie is willing to admit for the first time since they arrived at the flak house. He would be perfectly content to remain here forever so long as Crosby kept him company. Despite their lack of belief in the positive impact of such flak houses, Rosie knew they both saw the beauty of such a place, of such a life. A beauty that cannot protect itself. And so they return to war, but they are returning together. They return to the fight where they are fighting for each other and they are fighting for the beauty of a life that would be worth living once the war was over.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They took one last ride that morning. They saddled up in the dark with the help of an old stable hand and set off on the familiar path. Just the two of them. The sunrise waiting for them when they crested the hill of the meadow was breathtaking.

They took one last stroll through the garden that afternoon after lunch. The weather turned sour as they passed by bushes of rhododendrons experiencing their "second spring", blooming thanks to dry summer and frequent autumn rain. Their walk ended abruptly when the sky opened up, laughing as they ducked under pergolas and arches for brief reprieves from the downpour as they sought shelter within the confines of the manor.

They took one last dip in the indoor pool, surprised but pleased by the lack of people they had anticipated to find. Crosby stretched out on a towel on the floor of the pool deck, head resting on his forearms as he watched Rosie swim back and forth. He swore he only shut his eyes for a moment before he was scooped off of the ground and into Rosie's arms. Crosby grabbed at Rosie's shoulders unashamedly, swears and threats slipping off his tongue to no avail. Rosie stepped off of the pool ledge with him still in his arms and the pair plummeted into the cold water.

"You should come play, Croz," Rosie suggested as they walked back towards the common spaces having changed out of their swimwear.

“The more the merrier.”

“Nah,” he refused. “Don’t worry about me. I’ve got a time scheduled with Dr. Huston.”

“You sure?” Rosie questioned.

“Go spend time with your boys,” Crosby urged, shoving him gently. “You can come find me when you’re done. I’ll be around.”

Rosie finally nodded, smiling before turning and heading through the doorway. Crosby lingered in the hallway, listening as the men greeted Rosie.

“There he is!”

“Hey!”

“Well, to what do we owe this honor?” There was a screech of chairs against the floor and the shuffling of feet.

“We’re almost out of this joint and, uh, I’m after your cash,” he heard the pilot chuckle.

“Oh, wow.”

“Ooh, Rosie. Big spender,” one quipped. “Hey, this is the guy I was telling you about.”

“Is he telling stories again?”

“Yeah, I’ve got a story. Our last mission over Münster,” spoke a voice Crosby recognized. Ronald Bailey: a solid navigator. Decent logs. A real chatterbox. “One by one, we see everyone go down until we’re the last bird in the sky. Sitting ducks. We know they’re coming for us any fucking second. And then we hear it.” Crosby had turned to walk away, having heard the story before, but paused when Pappy began to hum. Milburn joined in mimicking what he can only assume is the sound of trumpets.

“Is that what I sound like?” Rosie chuckled.

“We’re about to get our balls blown off when this guy here, this crazy bastard, starts humming Artie Shaw. Out of the blue. And it was the strangest thing. But I gotta say, hearing his voice over the radio, that was the first time that I didn’t feel scared shitless. Even though he’d clearly lost his fucking marbles.”

“I knew I wasn’t alone.”

“None of us were.”

“None of us are,” Rosie added firmly.

Crosby smiled softly to himself as he walked away, laughter echoing through the halls behind him.

After breezing through the interior of the manor, Rosie searched the garden and the greenhouse, on the way to the stables, when he found Crosby. There upon the hill, he was nothing more than a silhouette against the sunset. When Crosby looked over his shoulder and locked eyes with him and smiled, a ring of light illuminating his silhouette, Rosie nearly stumbled.

He patted the ground beside him and Rosie sat closely beside the navigator, neither speaking up as they took in the sight before them watching as sunbeams danced across the sky in brilliant shades of yellows and oranges, clouds off in the distance cast in the soft glow of pinks and reds. For a moment, Rosie was up there in those clouds, surrounded by those same yellows and oranges. Only they were not warm, they were hot; Instantaneous burning flashes of yellows and oranges and black and drab green pushed to the front of his mind along with images he had thought were all but neatly tucked away into the back of his mind. Rosie turned his head and shut his eyes, willing the thoughts of fallen Forts away.

A weight rested upon his knee and when he opened his eyes, all he saw was the face of the man sitting beside him. Crosby had moved closer so that their arms brushed against each other. He had a knowing look on his face, one that immediately provided all of the comfort reassurance, and understanding that Rosie needed without any words.

Rosie glanced down at his hand for a moment before he looked back towards the sunset, a slight red flush creeping into his cheeks just as the sun dipped below the horizon. The trail of colors left in the sun’s wake began to wane until they found themselves plunged into the deep blue darkness of dusk.

A gust of wind washed over them and Crosby instinctually pressed into Rosie’s side, trying to rub warmth back into his arms. Rosie swiftly shrugged out of his brown leather jacket and in one swoop he put it around the navigator's shoulders.

"You looked cold," he explained. Crosby tried to protest but found that he was unable to remove the jacket after Rosie wrapped an arm around his shoulder, leaning against the smaller man.

They made their departure not long after, silently agreed the chill had surpassed mere discomfort. Crosby walked ahead of Rosie with the pilot's jacket hanging off of his more narrow shoulders, making it somewhat obvious that it did not belong to him. If the fit of the jacket wasn't a clear indication, the familiar yellow script of "Rosie's Riveters" emblazoned on the back was a dead giveaway. Something in Rosie swelled at the sight, a pinch of satisfactory possessiveness and a whole lot of pride.

Crosby looked over his shoulder, slowing his pace when he noticed Rosie's feet weren't moving. He raised an eyebrow and gave a sort of half smile. He jerked his head in the direction of the house and then turned back to resume the path he was heading.

Rosie jogged to catch up, shoving his hands in his pockets when he fell into step with Crosby.

Even as they meandered back towards the main house, Crosby did not slip his arms into the sleeves of the leather jacket. Instead, he carefully grabbed each side and pulled it tighter around his torso, holding the left side over the right to create a seal to keep warmth in.

"I believe congratulations are in order, by the way," Crosby spoke up, intentionally bumping into Rosie. "-for winning the baseball game earlier today. You did win, right?"

"I mean, it wasn't much of a game. We didn't have enough for two full teams," Rosie chuckled, looking at the ground. "But yeah, yes, I suppose my team won."

"That's what I thought," Crosby grinned. He looked away from the pilot as he pondered. "You're good," he added as an afterthought.

"You were watching me?" Rosie couldn't help but tease, ignoring the flush of embarrassment. "How much did you see?"

"Enough," he teased cryptically. "You play in college?"

"Yeah, I was captain, believe it or not," he couldn't help but subtly boast.

"Oh?" Crosby admired. He looked over at Rosie and Rosie preened at

the attention.

“Captain of the football team too,” he added. Rosie just about crumbled at the way his eyes lit up.

"You're something special, Ro, you know that?" Croz giggled. “How you’re still single is something I will never know.”

“Thanks, Croz,” he grinned.

They reached their assigned rooms far too soon, coincidentally and conveniently situated directly across the hall from one another.

He opened the door to his room and stepped through the threshold. When he turned to shut the door he couldn't help but stop and watch the navigator's retreating form.

"I'll, uh, see you in a bit?" he called out softly. He couldn't have hidden the hopeful and desperate tone even if he wanted to.

Crosby shrugged, but Rosie took the large grin on his face as a good sign. A more obvious sign showed its face when Crosby didn’t even bother closing the door behind him.

The last couple nights they had foregone the dance of their midnight meetings, having realized pretty quickly that if they were going to end up in each other’s company they might as well skip the futile attempts at sleeping alone. Rosie followed eagerly.

* * *

“Can I ask you something?” Crosby asked, tilting his head back against Rosie’s bare chest as he handed over his near-empty wine glass. Rosie set it on the bedside table beside his own and then put his arm around Crosby’s shoulder. Crosby settled in, resting more on Rosie than on the pillows supporting his back. Rosie sat mostly upright against the combined mound of pillows from both their rooms.

“Always,” Rosie immediately replied, softly squeezing Crosby’s bicep. He looked down at Crosby, who leaned back against Rosie’s left side at a slight angle. The navigator’s forearm rested loosely in the dip between his two thighs and his hand lay gently on his knee.

"Why are you so dead set on flying every mission?" he asked curiously. He always appreciated that about Croz, that he was blunt but not necessarily abrasive.

"It's what we're here for, Croz," Rosie responded simply, his thumb rubbing circles on Crosby's bicep underneath the short sleeve of his oversized t-shirt.

"I know, I just–" Crosby paused mid-sentence. Rosie glanced down at him, studying his face as he thought. "I know there's more than that."

"I'll say that some days– most days," Rosie admitted. "It feels like nothing is waiting for me on the ground."

"There's Germans waiting for you in the air," Crosby pointed out.

"Croz, there's Germans on the ground too," he countered.

"I don't think that helps your argument as much as you think it does," Crosby rolled his eyes, squeezing his knee.

"Maybe not," Rosie conceded, tipping his head in acknowledgment but smiling softly.

"I'll be waiting," Crosby mumbled quietly. So quietly that Rosie couldn't tell if heard correctly.

"Hmm?" Rosie squeezed closer to him, tilting his head softly to try and catch what he'd said.

"I'll, uh… I said I'll be waiting.." he cleared his throat, eyes flitting to Rosie before shying, not pulling away.

"Yeah?" He prodded, unable to contain his smile.

"I mean it's not like I have much of a choice," Crosby complained weakly. "So, yeah. I'll be waiting for you."

Rosie's eyes lit up and his chest swelled. "Oh? You'll be waiting for me?" He meant to come off as teasing, a light-hearted jeer, but instead, it seemed to convey a weight that only reassurance can relieve.

"You and every other crew," Crosby huffed, still looking everywhere but the man behind him. He snuck a glance back, catching the pilot's discouraged look, and caved. "Yes, I will be waiting for you, Ro," he confessed, placing his hand more firmly on Rosie's thigh just above his knee. "Especially you."

The pilot wrapped his arms loosely around Crosby's neck, leaned forward, and pressed an exaggerated kiss onto his forehead. "Thanks,

doll," Rosie cooed.

Crosby laughed, hands coming up to hold onto the forearms arms resting on his chest. Rosie rests his cheek on the top of Crosby's head and squeezes him tighter.

* * *

Rosie pushed open the door. Crosby stood in front of the mirror fixing his buttons and pins, smoothing out the nonexistent wrinkles in his slacks. Looking back up from his clothing, he caught Rosie standing in the doorway behind him in the mirror. He smiled softly and Rosie beamed back, taking that as his cue. He set his bag just inside the doorway and made his way inside towards the other man. He grabbed Crosby's hat off of the dresser and removed the grommet. Crosby turned his body to face him just as Rosie stepped up to place the hat on the shorter man's head at a rakish angle.

Rosie directed Crosby to turn back to face the mirror but didn't remove his hands from Crosby's arms as he stood behind him.

"How do I look?"

"Like a rock, Croz," Rosie grinned, squeezing his arms. Crosby threw his head back and laughed, face flushing as he turned around to face the pilot. He squinted and reached his hands up to Rosie's hair, carefully manipulating the strands of curls with his fingertips.

"There," he murmured, once he got them to cooperate in a way that pleased him. He smoothed his hands over Rosie's shoulders and down the front of his jacket, fixing his collar and flicking a piece of lint off of his sleeve.

They made their way down the staircase and set their backs into the jeep. Rosie hopped into the back and held out a hand to Crosby. Settled in the back row of the jeep, Rosie slung his arm over the backrest, thumb occasionally brushing against Crosby's back. Pappy, Ron, and Milburn filled the seats around them, yelling animately about who had won the game earlier that morning, all in good nature. Everyone grew quiet as the jeep lurched forward, setting off down the dirt road. The trio twisted in their seats to watch the manor grow farther and farther away until they turned off of the drive and onto the street. They twisted again to get one last look before it was out of sight.

Neither Crosby nor Rosie spared the so-called sanctuary as much as a

glance. Both were of firm belief that there was no place in times of war for such asylums that did nothing more than feed into delusion. They might miss the quality of meals and the large, comfortable beds; Crosby may have felt a twinge of sadness when they had fed Roseakin one last sugar cube that morning before heading in to prepare for their departure. However, they wouldn't miss Coombe House with its fields of false hope and gardens filled with nothing more than memories of a long-forgotten time.

It's a shame it has to end, Rosie is willing to admit for the first time since they arrived at the flak house. He would be perfectly content to remain here forever so long as Crosby kept him company. Despite their lack of belief in the positive impact of such flak houses, Rosie knew they both saw the beauty of such a place, of such a life. A beauty that cannot protect itself. And so they return to war, but they are returning together. They return to the fight where they are fighting for each other and they are fighting for the beauty of a life that would be worth living once the war was over.

* * *

Rosie walked through his usual pre-flight checks with ease. The sun shone brightly down upon him, though its warmth was subdued by the chill of the October air. He subconsciously checked off his list as he examined the aircraft from nose to tail, but for the first time, he took no comfort in the monotonous task.

For the first time, he unwillingly held his breath as he stood before the hatch opening. He braced his hands on either side of his preferred entrance, shifting his weight from one leg to the other. He drummed his fingers against the metal skin of the plane, staring up into the darkened interior.

After a few long moments, he steeled a look over his shoulder at the tower in the distance. Rosie could make out a lone figure standing on the highest balancing, leaning against the railing. He dropped his head, smiling down at the concrete beneath his boots. He glanced back one last time, letting out a breath he didn't know he was holding. With one last nod, Rosie heaved himself up and into the plane.

"I'll be waiting," Crosby had reassured the night before, voice firm and yet soft, as though there was nothing else he had been more sure of in his life and he needed Rosie to understand that. If not for Rosie's sake, then for his own.

Chapter End Notes

FACT CORNER
(1) This is the cuddle position I was trying to describe btw lol it's pretty suggestive but hell this entire story is pretty suggestive lol side note, I'm lowkey thinking about writing an nsfw "missing scene" and posting it separately, lmk if you'd be interested and maybe it'll happen ;)

https://media.istockphoto.com/id/1281770259/photo/loving-same-sex-male-couple-lying-on-sofa-at-home-watching-tv-and-relaxing-together.jpg?s=612x612&w=0&k=20&c=4NaFKo_8Yl5gZ6PE1EmJfvFACQmDht7Ra_

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